

Islam! - The Modern Alternative

Why Islam is good for you!

source: ***Invitation to Islam***, Issue 2, July 1997

Some people think that to live an Islamic life is "restrictive". Islam however, was revealed as a balanced way of living.

Allah (The Most High) created all the humans with what is called 'A Fitrah' (a natural state/desire). [1]

Islam recognises that within this Fitrah there are motivations that influence a man's role on earth e.g. a desire for good food and drink, to have a home, a desire for love and sex, to protect and be protected and to be successful and strong. Without some form of control and limit, all of these legitimate motives could prove very dangerous.

So what constitutes the perfect control for the Fitrah? It must be a method that provides an organised yet practical demonstration of how to balance all these natural human desires. It cannot be something that goes against the Fitrah, by placing on it extra burdens. Likewise, it cannot be something that allows the human desires to run wild without any form of control.

Islam is the perfect control for the Fitrah. It provides a divine method that elevates man above animals and the rest of creation.

Limited Wisdom

Humans lack perfect knowledge as well as perfect wisdom. No matter how hard we try, we will never attain the perfect way of life by our own thinking and interpretation. This is the reason why Allaah being the Most Wise, sent us the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad (may Allaah extol his mention and grant him peace) to show us this practical and organised way of life.

Allaah, being Perfect, in His Wisdom and Knowledge, perfected a complete way of life for us. He has set His limitations and rules, all of which are beneficial to mankind, and therefore, do not need changing:

"These are the limits (set) by Allaah, so do not approach them"
[Surah al-Baqarah (2):1871]

"These are the limits set by Allaah, so do not transgress them"
[Surah al-Baqarah (2):229]

This is why Islam does not allow celibacy, because it is against the Fitrah, i.e., the desire for sex. Celibacy goes beyond the limits required by humans, and is something that cannot be fulfilled because humans are designed to procreate.

As humans we are not expected to fast every single day for the rest of our lives (for most 30 days of the year provides an up-hill struggle). It is also from ignorance to say that 'I shall not sleep during the night, but rather I shall pray!' [2] Humans have not been created by Allah to live life in such a manner. There is a balance which must be observed.

The following incident describes the Islamic stance towards such behaviour, Anas reported that some of the Companions of Allaah's Messenger (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) used to say: "I will not marry women"; someone else said: "I will not eat meat"; and someone else said: "I will not lie down in bed". (On hearing this): The Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) praised Allaah, and glorified Him and said: "What has happened to these people that they say so and so, whereas I observe prayer and I sleep too. I observe fast and I break my fast; I marry women also. And he who turns away from my Sunnah (i.e., my example or lifestyle), he has no relation with me." [Narrated in Saheeh Muslim vol.2. p703. no.32361].

Islam on the other hand, does not allow the person to surrender themselves to lust and desire, as in contemporary 'civilisation'. Islam recognises the love a man has for women, children, gold, silver, and other possessions. But it provides a limit for the amount of this worldly pleasure which we require, and reminds us of the life in the hereafter.

"Beautified for men is the love of things they desire: Women, Children, much of gold and silver (wealth), branded beautiful horses, cattle and well-tilled land. This is the pleasure of the present world's life, but Allaah has the excellent return (Paradise)." [Surah Aali-Imraan (3):141]

The inclinations and desires of the Fitrah are not to become the objective in life. Rather they are to be taken in a stabilised manner. The way to deal with them is real and Allaah (The Most High) has given us the detailed descriptions of a leveled approach. This leveled approach gives mankind the perfectly balanced pleasure in this worldly life. The method of maintaining a well-balanced life is not an endurance test to see who lasts the longest. Allah has revealed Islam, to show us how to attain this balance in a real manner. Life is not a torturous spiritual test, where you are ordered to live in mountains and trees. Fasting all year round is not obligatory. Marriage is permissible and you do not have to beat yourself senseless to purify your soul! Rather as Muslims, we must try to follow the Prophet and his balanced teachings of life and living. As Allah says in the Qur'an:

"Indeed in the Messenger of Allah, you have a good example to follow.." [Surah Al-Ahzab (33):21]

Restrictive Rules

The use of the word "restrictive" often comes from those who think they live a "free- life". But the fact of the matter is that, wherever you go you will find rules and regulations. For example, in the workplace, in colleges and universities and more obviously on the roads, i.e. the highway and green cross codes. Wherever you are, there are rules and regulations.

Islam forbids us to follow many of the rules which are held by western culture and subcultures. Yet people in the west are more than willing to obey them, because they believe that these rules will protect them. How wrong they are! Rave subculture is a classical example of this. Informal dance floor rules dictate to us "...to drink lots of water, have frequent breaks and don't take too many pills in one go!" Despite these "recommendations", young people are still dying [3].

Western society is obsessed with 'safe sex', in order to 'prevent the risk of catching AIDS'. Despite the wide availability of contraceptives, AIDS is still on the increase, and people are dropping like flies from this killer epidemic.

Do we think of these rules as being restrictive? If anything you would expect them to bring about a sense of control and order, as well as increasing the pleasure. Without realising, people are ready and willing to accept many man-made rules. Rules that are invented by one group of people and to be obeyed by the rest of society. These rules are not perfect because man is imperfect, yet people accept them and hope and believe that they will benefit from them.

A Better Offer!

So when the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth is offering a reward which is high, and the Benefit is eternal, shouldn't we at least see what's on offer?

"You desire the good of this world, but Allaah desires (for you) the Hereafter. And Allaah is Almighty, All Wise." [Surah Al-Anfal (8):67]

"...in a lofty Paradise. Therein will be a running spring. Therein will be thrones raised high. And cups set at hand. And cushions set in rows. And rich carpets (all) spread out." [Surah Al-Ghaashiyah (88):10-16]

This worldly life has many good things in it. Things that Allah has created for us to utilise. But the reality is all of these luxuries and benefits of the world will come to an end. For example, a person's good looks may do them many favours during their youth, but will it hold them on good ground when they are 60. Such is the reality of old age.

Likewise with wealth. Islam allows you to gain wealth as long as you do not oppress other people, and transgress the limits set by Allaah (The Most High). An example of this is making people pay back more money than they actually borrow, through usury or interest payments.

However wealth can not benefit you when you die, as it only passes on to your family as inheritance. Such is the civility of modern society, that many people are even killed, just so that inheritance can be gained sooner rather than later!!

Thus, we should see ourselves as travelers on a journey. A traveler is one who is constantly on the move. He will only take essential provisions, and not all his life's possessions. Likewise, a person must realise that Allah did not design the luxuries of this world to last forever. They only exist to aid our worship of Allah, which will take us to the journey's end, the hereafter. Being human, we must one-day die, and our worldly benefits and luxuries will also perish. The true wealth is indeed with Allah in the next-life. As Allah says:

"Seeking the perishable goods of the worldly life. There are much more profits and booties with Allah." [Surah An-Nisa (4):94]

Man-made restrictions exist in all aspects of western society. Industry, travel and leisure, are just a few of the sectors which are dominated by human restrictions. Humans automatically assume that these restrictions are there to protect them. In part this may be true, but what about the restrictions set by Allah which can save the whole of mankind? Such restrictions come from the One Who is Perfect, and not man, who is imperfect! The so-called 'freedom' of 'modern civilisation', is one which is defined for you, by another human. We are often told what is 'politically correct' and what is not. We are told that this is what everybody will be wearing this Summer, and that this is the film to

watch. Those are the new Hollywood stars to emerge. You shouldn't be seen 'dead' in this dress and you should paint your finger-nails this colour. The list is endless. All of this is then redefined to fit in with the next wave of fashion trends. Those who do not conform are labeled bigamist, narrow-minded, backward, out-dated and so on.

Modern civilisation allows you so much freedom, that you can even waiver the law if you are 'well connected'. Laws are often defined by a small group of people, with everyone else conforming to what they consider right and wrong. What kind of justice is this? This would be more acceptable to those who accept the concept of man being divine. A concept where men decide what is moral and immoral even if it contradicts what God has already laid out for us. God has no part to play in such a civilisation, because man has adopted the role of god for himself. History bears witness to this as it was the way of the civilisations before the advent of the prophet Muhammad (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam), as Allah says:

"They (Jews & Christians) took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords besides Allah (by obeying them in things which they made lawful or unlawful according to their own desires without being ordered by Allah)"
[Surah at-Taubah (9):31]

The true freedom of man is found in a civilisation that has a divine value system. A civilisation in which man submits to his Creator alone. A civilisation that reacts with the life of this world and links it to the Day of Judgement. On that Day, everyone will be held accountable in front of ALLAH, the Creator and The True Master of the universe.

The Purpose

Allaah created man and man belongs to Him. Allah decreed that one day man shall die and return to Him. The world is just a temporary period. We are born, we live in this world and then we die.

So while we are on this earth Allaah has given us the instruction manual to shape our lives according to what He has decreed. This is the meaning of worship. It requires absolute obedience, humility and love for Allaah, the way He has prescribed it.

We cannot love Allaah the way we want to, especially if we do not know what Allaah loves or hates in the first place.

So through Allaah's Perfect Wisdom and Infinite Knowledge, He sent us the Qur'aan and the Prophet Muhammad (sallallaahu layhi wa sallam), and told us how this love is to be expressed:

"Say (O Muhammad to mankind): If you really love Allaah then follow me (i.e. the Prophet, and accept that Allaah is the one truly deserving of worship, follow the Qur'an and the Sunnah). **Allaah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allaah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful!"**
[Surah Aali-Imraan (3):31]

The Problem with Human Law

Humans by themselves cannot determine what is good and bad for each other for all of the time. Man-made laws are often defined by a person's personal motives, emotions, limited intellect, beliefs and prejudices. Thus, they are

designed with these built-in flaws. This is why human law has so many loopholes and deficiencies. It is always requiring change, modification and re-modification, time after time!

So when Allaah (The Most High) revealed the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam), all the details about good and bad, or right and wrong, were not left for the limited nature of mankind to define for themselves. Allaah (The Most High) says:

"And We have sent down to you the Book (Qur'an) as an EXPLANATION of EVERYTHING and a GUIDANCE, a Mercy and glad tidings for those who have surrendered (to Allaah as Muslims)" [Surah An-Nahl (16):89]

So What is Islam saying?

The message of Islam fits the Fitrah of man. Allaah (The Most Wise) created man in the best form. He gave his Fitrah the ability to believe in the Unseen. Thus, man's soul and its horizons are broader and more open than that of the rest of creation - like the animals, bird's and insects. In nature we can see the signs of Allah:

"Do they not look at the camels, and how they were created? And at the heavens, how it is raised? And at the mountains, how they are rooted and fixed firm? And at the earth, how it is spread out?"

[Surah Al-Ghaashiyah (88):17-20]

In ourselves we can see Allah's signs through the diversity of our languages, colours and nationalities.

"O mankind! We have created you from a male and female, and have made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another"

[Surah Al-Hujuraat (49):13]

Having been told this, we must now recognise the Perfect way our Creator has chosen for us to follow, which is:

"Indeed, in the Messenger (Muhammad sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam), you have a good example to follow." [Surah Al-Ahzab (33):21]

We have been commanded to worship Allah alone without partners. We must recognise and understand that He is the Only True God who deserves to be worshipped;

"So know, that none has the right to be worshipped except Allah"

[Surah Muhammad (47):19]

To help us do this, Allaah (The Most High) sent the Prophet Muhammed (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam), to deliver and explain the Final Message of Islam, and to help us recognise and worship our Lord in the best manner. We have been told to form our lives' according to this Message, by following and imitating the Final Messenger who is our only guide to worshipping our Lord: Allah.

This is what is meant when we say: Laa ilaaha illa Allaah, wa Muhammadr Rasoolul-laah. **"There is no true God worthy of worship except Allaah, and Muhammad is the Final Messenger of Allaah"**

Footnotes

- [1] This can be explained as, the inborn or innate nature of mankind to recognise the Truth about the Creator [Allah]; that he is the only one who truly and sincerely deserves to be worshipped.
- [2] This is not to say that prayer at night is not important, but if you don't get enough sleep how are you going to fulfil your other obligations, e.g. going to work in order to provide for your family. The times of praying at night have been explained by the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) as being in the last 3rd of the night before the Fajr prayer.
- [3] The death of the teenager Leah Betts a few years ago [in England], has shown how such rules work to destroy the very society which forms them.